



Proposed Fishing Regulation Changes – 2018

Note: new language is in italics. Deleted language is indicated by strikethrough.
August 10, 2017

CHANGE --page 6

Other Permit Requirements and Laws

Aquatic Invertebrates – Crayfish/Mussels: A valid fishing license is required to harvest crayfish for personal use (see “License/Permit Requirements” for specific license requirements). Crayfish may be taken in traps no larger than 24x12x12 inches.

Freshwater mussel harvest or possession is prohibited in the Western and Central Fishing Districts. Mussels may be harvested for personal use in the Eastern Fishing District only. No fishing license is required to harvest mussels.

Rationale: The Western Pearshell (*Margaritifera falcata*) is a medium-sized (2-4 inch) brown- to black-colored freshwater mussel found in western North America, including the west half of Montana. It is considered a “Species of Concern” in Montana, and recent studies have shown there to be only 14 strong populations in the state, and an overall decline of 20% over the last decade. Although the viability of this species in Montana is threatened by numerous environmental factors, some of the populations have also been targeted by humans for food. This proposal would prohibit human harvest of all mussels in the Western and Central Fishing Districts in order to prevent disturbance of pearlshell mussel beds and/or accidental take from people seeking the other native mussel species (giant floater, fatmucket). This change would still permit the harvest of other mussels in the Eastern Fishing District.

WESTERN DISTRICT

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HANDKERCHIEF LAKE

- Catch and release for Arctic Grayling

Rationale: FWP is reestablishing a grayling population in the lake following a piscicide treatment. The population is a genetic refugia for the Red Rock grayling population. The Red Rock population has declined making it difficult to get fish to establish this population. We are releasing 400 2-year old grayling so even a low level of harvest could significantly reduce the numbers. Because anglers will catch these fish while fishing for westslope cutthroat trout, releasing these fish will minimize mortality. We will reinitiate harvest once the population becomes established.

CENTRAL DISTRICT

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Live Bait

- Fish species that may be collected and used as live bait in the Central Fishing District include only the following: Fathead Minnow, Flathead Chub, Western Silvery Minnow, Plains Minnow, Emerald Shiner, Longnose Dace, Lake Chub, Creek Chub, Longnose Sucker, and White Sucker. These approved bait species may be used as live bait only in the following waters:
 - Bighorn Lake and Afterbay Reservoir
 - Bighorn River—Afterbay Dam to the cable 600 feet downstream, and downstream from the Bighorn FAS
 - Clarks Fork Yellowstone River and tributaries, *except the Rock Creek drainage*—downstream from the bridge at Bridger
 - Marias River and tributaries downstream from I-15
 - Missouri River downstream from Morony Dam
 - Muddy Creek Drainage near Vaughn, including all streams and drainage canals
 - Teton River and tributaries downstream from I-15
 - Tiber Reservoir (Lake Elwell), Toole and Liberty counties
 - Yellowstone River and all streams and ditches in the drainage downstream from the mouth of the Clarks Fork (except the section of the Bighorn River between the cable 600 feet downstream from the Afterbay Dam and the Bighorn FAS).

Rationale: In 2016, the Commission added “and tributaries” to the Clarks Fork Yellowstone River to accommodate seiners wanting to collect bait fish in some irrigation ditches along the lower Clarks Fork. This change opened Rock Creek, and thus Cooney Reservoir to seining and live minnow use. Due to the concern with possible unintentional introduction of carp or other unwanted species, this proposed change will protect the Cooney fishery.

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BIG HOLE RIVER

Entire River

- Catch and release for Arctic Grayling
- ~~Extended season for Whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open December 1 to the third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots~~

~~Headwaters to North Fork Big Hole River~~

- ~~Brook trout open entire year~~

Headwaters to Dickie Bridge

- *Open entire year*
- Combined trout 5 daily and in possession, no size restriction

~~Dickie Bridge~~ ~~Divide Bridge (Divide FAS)~~ to Melrose Bridges (Salmon Fly FAS)

- Artificial lures only
- *Extended season for Whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open December 1 to the third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots*

Melrose Bridges (Salmon Fly FAS) to the mouth

- *Extended season for Whitefish and catch-and-release for trout open December 1 to the third Saturday in May with artificial lures and/or maggots*

Rationale: The Upper Big Hole River from the Headwaters to Dickie Bridge is the project area for the Arctic Grayling CCAA where most of the conservation activities occur to benefit grayling. The 5-trout combined limit with no size restrictions was intended to minimize interactions between Arctic Grayling and non-native trout and is more effective by allowing year-round harvest. Moving the boundary from the North Fork Big Hole confluence to Dickie Bridge allowing year-round fishing also increases the opportunity for anglers to harvest brook trout, aligns with the CCAA boundaries, and simplifies the regulations upstream of Dickie Bridge.

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LITTLE PRICKLY PEAR CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES (tributary to Missouri River)

~~Mouth to Big Sheep Creek Downstream from the most southerly I-15 Bridge over Little Prickly Pear Creek (1.9 miles north of Sieben Interchange, Exit 216)~~

- Open third Saturday in May through Labor Day

Rationale: This stream is an important spawning tributary of the Missouri River. Spawning rainbow trout and brown trout in the section upstream from the I-15 bridge were previously protected when the Central District river and stream season was “third Saturday in May to November 30.” When the Central District season changed in 2015 to “open all year” a 4.5 mile reach of stream was inadvertently left open to angling during the trout spawning seasons. This proposed change will reinstitute the seasonal closure.